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5-16-c22-73-1
10 May 1973

THE CHALLENGE OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

SUBMITTED AS WRITING REQUIREMENT FOR

ADVANCE COURSE-22

AT THE

UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

A great challenge confronting the chaplaincy is the challenge of spiritual leadership. As clergymen and Army officers, the role of spiritual leadership is unavoidable and inescapable. And if we fail in the role of leadership how great indeed is that failure!

The challenge of the Chaplaincy is to answer this question: How shall the churches proclaim" the good news of Jesus Christ" in a manner relevant to people's needs, and how shall the local chapel become a redemptive fellowship in which lives are reborn?

Preaching the gospel and teaching christian education have been the two main traditional, indispensable elements in the Christain experience. But these have never been fully implemented. This has been mainly because of the cultural lag in religious communications. Today's young men need to find a vocabulary by which they can communicate religious ideas and feelings to others. They must have an experience of God as well as possess knowledge about God.

In all other sciences, modern man's vocabulary has changed as the profession progressed. This has not been

the same with religion. As a result, the old theological words and religious symbols have little meaning. Therefore, they do not effectively communicate the basic theological concepts.

The church should be a laboratory where religious principles could be discovered, understood, and practiced. I believe, if young men would come to a clear understanding of what they believe, they would be more eager to live these spiritual truths. Personally,I feel there is no better way for communicating these spiritual truths than through christain education fellowship groups under the guidance of a skillful spiritual leader.

This paper will be concerned with showing how the Chaplain can rise to the challenge of spiritual leadership using the"group-centered approach."

II. THE ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN

The role of the chaplain in making the ministry of Christ relevant through the creation of small fellowship groups can be done in many ways. Participation of the chaplain can range from full involvement as one member, to close supervision, to almost complete detachment.

The temperament and the ways of work of individual chaplains, along with the resourcefulness of the group, will have much to do with the relationship which prevails in any church.

However, not every chaplain is suited by temperament to enter into the close and costly relations growing out of the lives of groups, just as others are not suited for the large scale responsibilities of administration or the intellectual and spiritual demands of the pulpit. But most chaplains can undertake the leadership of groups and the pastoral care that arises through them, although this may be more a matter of choice, if not dedication, than he cares to admit.

The role of "Leader," connected with "Group-Centered Approach," are two important factors making the ministry relevant and the local church a redemptive fellowship.

A. Definition of Leadership. There are many good definitions of "Leadership."but the one used in this paper defines leadership as the ability to influence people within a particular social context, and further, influence in a manner that induces people to follow or to modify their views, or to be directive(channel their thinking). One important aspect of "Leadership"is that it always involves attempts on the part of a leader to influence followers in situations.[1]

B. Definition of the Group-Centered Approach.In contrast to the leader-centered approach which is concerned with discovering, improving, and training leaders, the"Group-Centered Approach" is concerned with discovering methods of developing the potentialities of group members so that they may become more capable of constructive self-direction--in fact, so that they may become less dependent upon their leaders and free to take an active part in shaping their own destines. This approach involves raising questions essentially concerned with enhancing the group rather than the leader.[2]

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1 Thomas Gordon, Group-Centered Leadership(New York Houghton Mifflin Company. 1955).p.187.

III. DEVELOPING A FELLOWSHIP GROUP

The development of small groups in the life of the church is not a gimmick. It is not a technique to add more programs to churches, which for the most part, are already overburdened with programs. The only perpose is to provide God with an effective channel of communication whereby he can reveal himself to his people, and the gospel can become a living reality.

How many people have you heard say this at church gatherings: "My relations with my minister were always along the lines of church organization. But once--just once before I die, I would like to sit down with my minister and my church friends and think about ways in which my religion could become a way of life." [3]This search for communication, communion, and dialogue has existed in the church for centuries.

It is needless to say that the most effective fellowship groups begin when the hunger for this fruit--faith and determination of concerned congregations--are matched with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Here, as in every part of a Christian's life,we must"work out our salvation with

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[3] John L Castell, Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Groups New York: Association Press, 1964),p.78.

fear and trembling,"believing that"it is God's work in us both to will and to do his good pleasure."[4]This means the chaplain has the responsibility of making use of every available means to attract the available in fellowship groups--pulpit notices, broadcast letters, open meeting groups, and personal invitation by letter or word of mouth. As a minister once said:"The harvest from such effort may seem meager, but a few persons may be enlisted for the beginning of the experiment."

The challenge is to motivate the congregation to seek a deeper meaning of the good news. Once these methods are set in motion, there will be a need for praying in faith that God will stir up a hunger for life in others, and will open doors for us to speak to the right persons and to take the right steps when the time is ready. The chaplain's(spiritual leader) readiness to become one of a fellowship group lies in his willingness to undertake the strenuous work of doing everything he can to encourage the formation of a fellowship group. One minister answered those who asked,"How do we begin?," by saying,"Be the first member yourself."[5]

A. Develop a Purpose. At the first meeting of a few prospective members care should be taken that the purpose of the meeting is made clear and the general characteristics of a group

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[4] John R. Fry, A Hard Look At Adult Christian Education (Philadelphia:The Westiminister Press, 1959),p.30.

[5] Ibid.,p.36.

are understood. The purpose may be to have an elaborate discussion of contemporary theological trends or a topic on social issues. It is important to make known the "hunger" people have for such an experience as the group seems to offer.

B. Develop Involvement. Participants must be involved emotionally and practically in the problems and opportunities of the group. Unless the participant feels that it is his group, his participation, his involvement, and his contribution he is not apt to continue the relationship merely as a spectator. Concerning his idea John L. Castell in Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Group, discusses some results of participants' involvement in study groups.

> 1. "An excellent opportunity is provided for our people to know the christian community. Here there is the experience of being accepted as a person, important in his own right. And as one has the experience of being accepted, so also one accepts others and discovers a wonderful sense of togetherness as he seeks to grow in Christian knowledge and obedience.
>
> 2. In the study groups the individual learns. Here many of the goals of adult christian education are realized.
>
> 3. The individual is often challenged to be quite introspective in regard to his personal religious life thus furthering religious growth.
>
> 4. Group members grow in their sense of worship. Though the worship in these groups is usually quite informal and brief, it is often very meaningful in spite of its brevity. It takes advanage of the creative movement.

5.The relationship to the church is strengthened by membership in the group.

6.The small study group often becomes in the most real sense, the redemptive fellowship of the church in action. Within the intense relationship of the group a person, whose religious life is weak and sporadic, often finds the church for the first time. Conversion, quiet and unostentatious, often is the result of the individual's membership in the group.

7.Experience is gained in personal witnessing to the faith. Our churches will be strong in ratio to the members ability to give a reason for the faith that is in them."[6]

There is one further advantage that occures which utilizes the spiritual fellowship group. Those individuals who have not previously found a place in the church program will now have a platform from which they can speak to the church and the chaplain. It is this feedback that will ultimately inform the perceptive chaplain of both the needs of his parish and the effectiveness of his efforts to meet these needs. Such free and spontaneous information is less likely to be offered during a sermon or a structured Sunday School Class, but it is the natural outgrowth of a group of persons secure in their mutual aoceptance. The greatest benefit to the chaplain and to the parish may

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[6] Castell, Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Groups. p.78.

not be measurable in attendance figure reports, but is the greater service which they are enabled to perform in the name of God to the military community.

Education through spiritual fellowship groups helps to create the sense of the Christain community within which the individual can reach his maximum fulfillment in the clearest Biblical sense, and captures the spirit expressed in the chaplain motto. This approach will bring maximum benefit to the parish because it concentrates on individuals. Its goals are not statistical, and it recognizes the teaching ministry of each man toward his brother.

IV. GROUP -CENTERED APPROACH

> The most effective leader is one who can create the conditions by which he will actually lose the leadership. Thus, the person who finds himself the leader of a group will, by creating the proper conditions, distribute the group. [7]

Dr Carl R. Rogers, in his chapter on Group-Centered Leadership, expressed this point beautifully. I believe that the chaplain(spiritual leader) can put this idea into action as he makes known to the members how he plans to participate in and guide the groups. He should explain that by using the "Group-Centered Approach,"it will enable the group to move toward discovering ways by which each individual group member may learn to clarify and diagnose his own needs and learn how to achieve self-understanding. The chaplain(spiritual leader)should further stress that he will make every effort to create the necessary conditions whereby every individual is Free" and not dependent on the skills and insights of the expert.

The spiritual leader would focus his efforts on helping members learn to take more responsibility in analyzing their own strengths and weaknesses. As the

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Carl R. Rogers Client Centered Therapy(New York: Houghton Mifflin Company,1965),p.335.

spiritual leader, the chaplain would ask questions, make suggestions, summarize decisions, and suggest collateral reading. Initiative for future direction would be left largely up to the group. The group should be able to set its own pace.

Usually as the group moves in this process, the search for God's truth becomes evident. Even the most convinced person, orthodox or liberal, must yield his religious opinions to a greater Lord and greater truth than any have yet conceived. Then the study group can start raising questions that are so crucial, but so hard to articulate: "Who am I?", What is the purpose of my life?"

When members in a group start asking these kinds of questions--the type where true dialogue takes place-- then miracles take place also. Concerning this idea, Revel L. Howe, author of the Miracle of Dialogue, wrote this message:

> "We can expect miracles of dialogue because... dialogue brings us face to face with truths in a relationship of love. As each person speaks and responds honestly to the other, each moves toward the other and includes him. This kind of meeting between man and man's cannot occur without an implicit meeting between man and God. To really see another is to see the other, and to really love another is to love the other. When we are truly known by another we are known by

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8 Gordon, Group-Centered Leadership. p.43

God, and to be truly loved by another is to know the love of God. Dialogue...is more than communication. It is communion in which we are mutually informed, purified, illumined, and reunited to ourselves, to one another, and God".9

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9 Reuel L. Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: The Leabury Press, 1963 p. 106.

V. CONCLUSION

In closing, there are two things that need to be stressed. First, the Church, under the leadership of a chaplain, must be willing to courageously face its own questions. Otherwise the Christian faith will remain wrapped up in old theological symbolism nice to hear in the church on Sunday morning, but hardly to be confused with the useful language of everyday living.

Secondly, small fellowship groups, if they are to have a place in the life of the Church, must be redemptive fellowships of love in which the living Christ can be known. God alone can give birth to such a community.[10]

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[10] Castell, Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Groups. p.78.

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